

"PROSTATE CANCER: The Silent Killer"

Hearing of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

Statement of Senator John Breaux, Ranking Member

September 23, 1997

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing and thanks to you, Sen. Shelby, for your leadership on this very important public health issue. I am particularly pleased to join Sen. Grassley in welcoming back one of the true giants of the Senate, former majority leader Bob Dole.

Undoubtedly, one of the worst pieces of news men can hear is that they have prostate cancer. Unfortunately, it is news that is all-too-common, with as many as 20 percent of all men likely to face the disease.

In the past, men have generally been reluctant to have prostate cancer screenings. Sens. Dole and Shelby and our other leading witnesses today have done a great public service for us and our families by highlighting the importance of early diagnosis and treatment. They have turned their own personal battles with prostate cancer into positive educational efforts aimed at raising awareness. But more important, they serve as inspirational role models for others.

With passage of this year's balanced budget agreement, Medicare will begin covering yearly screenings for beneficiaries. The benefits of screening for prostate cancer are clear: lives are saved through early detection.

While there is some disagreement in the medical community as to how routine screenings should be, one point on which we can all agree is that more research is needed in order to find the best ways to treat prostate cancer. There are currently several studies underway that hopefully will help us minimize and eventually eliminate the harmful effects of prostate cancer.

It is especially important to direct outreach and educational efforts to members of the African-American community. Black men are at 70-80 percent greater risk than whites to develop prostate cancer.

I look forward to hearing from our excellent witnesses and learning more about the screening and detection of prostate cancer and how we can raise awareness about this serious disease and the treatment options available.